United Nations A/CN.10/PV.248

General Assembly

Official Records

Disarmament Commission

248th meeting

Wednesday, 28 August 2002, 10.00 a.m.

New York

Chairperson: Ms. Quarless ..... (Jamaica)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

Opening of the session

The Chairperson: I declare open the 2001 organizational session of the Disarmament Commission.

As in past years, the Commission has been convened today to deal with organizational matters, including the election of the Chairman and other members of the Bureau for the 2002 session and the adoption of a draft provisional agenda for the 2002 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. There will be no need to address the appointment of the Chairpersons of the subsidiary bodies because, as members will recall, both Chairpersons were elected for the full three-year cycle, in accordance with General Assembly decision 52/492 of 8 September 1998.

Adoption of the agenda

The Chairperson: The provisional agenda for this organizational session is contained in document A/CN.10/L.50. May I take it that the Disarmament Commission adopts the provisional agenda?

The agenda was adopted.

Election of the Chairman and other officers

The Chairperson: In accordance with the established practice of rotation, it is the Group of Western European and other States that has the honour to nominate a candidate for the chairmanship of the Commission for the 2002 session. In that connection, I call on the representative of Ireland.

Ms. Murnaghan (Ireland): I have the great pleasure of taking the floor on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States to nominate Ambassador Mario Maiolini of Italy for the post of Chairman of the Disarmament Commission for its 2002 substantive session.

I can be very brief, because I think that people in this room will recognize Ambassador Maiolini as having had long experience as a diplomat in the Italian foreign service, as well as on disarmament issues. They will also be aware that he is currently permanent representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. I think he will make an excellent Chairman of the next session of the Disarmament Commission.

The Chairperson: If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Disarmament Commission wishes to elect Ambassador Mario Maiolini of Italy to the chairmanship of the Commission for its 2002 substantive session.

It was so decided.

The Chairperson: Allow me on behalf of the Commission warmly to congratulate Ambassador Maiolini on his election to this high office. I am certain that I speak on behalf of all members when I say that we are looking forward to benefiting from his wide experience and his diplomatic skill as he conducts the

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work of the Commission in the year to come. We wish him every success in the discharge of his duties and I assure him, on behalf of the Commission, of our fullest support.

I take this opportunity to encourage the Commission to continue to pursue its constructive approach to its work in the coming year, and to thank all the members of my Bureau — in particular, the Chairpersons of the two Working Groups, Mr. Yaw Odei Osei of Ghana and Ms. Gabriela Martinic of Argentina, and the other delegations that have supported the work of the Commission.

I wish also to express my sincere appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and his staff, as well as to the staff of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, in particular the Secretary of the Commission, Mr. Timur Alasaniya, for their professionalism and for the unswerving support that the Chair has received in the conduct of the work of the Commission during the 2001 session.

I now invite Ambassador Maiolini to assume the chairmanship.

Mr. Maiolini (Italy) took the Chair.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: Allow me at the outset to express gratitude for my election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its 2002 substantive session and for my having been entrusted with the important task of chairing this organizational session. I consider this to be an acknowledgement of my country's contribution to the important cause of security and disarmament in the modern world. I also want to express my gratitude for the kind words and wishes addressed to me. I count on the support and cooperation of all member States in achieving the Commission's important goals.

Let me make some general observations and say a few words about our future work. The 2002 disarmament calendar is rich in events. They are well known to members of the Commission. We believe that the present international climate is propitious for a wide variety of undertakings in the field of disarmament. We hope that this overall atmosphere of great expectations will influence positively the work of the Disarmament Commission.

The forthcoming session will the third and final year of deliberations on both substantive agenda items. Without exaggerating last year's achievement, one can note with satisfaction the solid foundation that was laid in the Working Groups. Conscious of the obstacles that exist, we consider that consensus on the difficult issues before the Commission is politically feasible and practically attainable. This in turn makes the job of delegations so much more challenging and intellectually stimulating. We hope that the Chairpersons of both Working Groups will continue their superb efforts towards consensus-building.

To be successful in discharging our duties, the members of the Bureau will count on the support and cooperation of members of the Commission. We hope will have good luck at the next session.

Election of the Chairman and other officers
(*continued*)

The Chairman: As is the case with the Chairman, other officers of the Commission are elected on the basis of the established principle of rotation. Accordingly, it is the turn of the Group of African States to nominate a candidate for the post of Rapporteur of the Disarmament Commission for the 2002 substantive session. It is my pleasure to inform delegations that the group has endorsed the candidacy of Mr. Meheidine El Kadiri of Morocco for that post.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to elect Mr. Meheidine El Kadiri as Rapporteur for its 2002 substantive session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: Allow me, on behalf of the Disarmament Commission, to congratulate my colleague Mr. Meheidine El Kadiri on his election to the post of Rapporteur of the Commission for its 2002 substantive session. I personally look forward to working with him; I shall count on his vast experience in the field of disarmament.

We shall now proceed to the election of the other members of the Bureau, namely the eight Vice-Chairmen of the Commission. In that connection, I wish to announce that the Group of Eastern European States has endorsed the candidacies of Mr. Valentin Rybakov of Belarus and of Mr. Alexandr Sporys of the Czech Republic for vice-chairmanships.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Disarmament Commission wishes to elect Mr. Valentin Rybakov of Belarus and Mr. Alexandr Sporys of the Czech Republic as Vice-Chairmen of the Commission for its 2002 substantive session by acclamation.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I warmly congratulate the officers who have been elected and wish them success in the discharge of their duties. I look forward to working with them, and I count on their counsel.

Six vice-chairmanships remain to be filled, in the following pattern: two for the Group of Asian States; two for the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States; and one for the Group of African States and one for the Group of Western European and other States. I have been informed that consultations continue within those regional groups with regard to their candidates for the remaining vice-chairmanships. I therefore suggest that this issue be taken up at a later stage.

Review of the draft resolution adopted by the First Committee at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly relating to the Disarmament Commission

The Chairman: As members of the Disarmament Commission are aware, the First Committee has recommended for adoption by the General Assembly a draft resolution which has specific bearing on the work of the Commission. For the sake of clarity, and for the benefit of members of the Commission, I would like to refer to that draft resolution.

Draft resolution A/C.1/56/L.4, entitled "Report of the Disarmament Commission", was adopted by the First Committee on 1 November 2001 under agenda item 76 (d). The relevant paragraphs of the draft resolution read as follows:

> "[The General Assembly] [r]ecommends that the Disarmament Commission, at its 2001 organizational session, adopt the following items for consideration at its 2002 substantive session:
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> (a) Ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament;
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> (b) Practical confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms; and
>
> "Requests the Disarmament Commission to meet for a period not exceeding three weeks during 2002 and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session". (A/C.1/56/L.4, paras. 5 and 6)

I have just outlined the portions of the draft resolution that have a direct relevance to the work of the Disarmament Commission. It appears that no delegation wishes to make a statement on this matter at this stage.

Draft provisional agenda for the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission in 2002

The Chairman: The draft provisional agenda for the 2002 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission is contained in document A/CN.10/L.51.

If there are no comments, I shall take it that the Commission wishes to adopt the draft provisional agenda for the 2002 substantive session as contained in document A/CN.10/L.51.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: The Commission is now invited to take note of document A/CN.10/2002/CRP.1, containing the provisional programme of work and timetable 1, which sets out somewhat detailed information regarding the first week of our future work. We will return to both those documents in a little while.

Organizational matters

The Chairman: As was the case during 2001, during the upcoming session the Commission will work on the basis of its usual practice, namely, a full three-week session. With that in mind, the Secretariat has arranged it so that the 2002 substantive session will take place from 22 April to 10 May. Allow me to add that those dates were arrived at taking numerous factors into consideration, particularly the disarmament calendar for the next year, especially the first meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which will precede the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission.

However, I would like to bring to the attention of delegations some new developments that have taken place during the last two days that will affect our schedule. The Secretariat has brought to my attention draft resolution A/56/L.7, by which the General Assembly is expected to decide to hold a special

session on children from 8 to 10 May 2002. Owing to its magnitude, that session will take over all United Nations meeting facilities during those three days. Therefore, the Disarmament Commission will only be able to meet to finish its work on Monday and Tuesday, 6 and 7 May, during the third week of its session. The Commission could hold two Working Group meetings per day during those two days, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Allow me now to draw the attention of delegations to the general programme of work contained in document A/CN.10/2002/CRP.1, to which I referred earlier. As delegations will see, in accordance with the original plan, the Commission was supposed to have two Working Group meetings a day on 6, 7 and 8 May, as well as one morning meeting on Thursday, 9 May. Furthermore, no meetings were planned for the afternoon of Thursday, 9 May, in order to allow the Secretariat to have the time it needs to process documents. The final plenary meeting was scheduled for the morning of Friday, 10 May.

As members can see, due to new circumstances, the Commission is losing two meetings on Wednesday, one meeting on Thursday and one meeting on Friday. If we add to this the two meetings on the previous Friday, 3 May, which falls on Orthodox Christian Good Friday, the total number of days during which the Commission will have no meetings during its 2002 substantive session will grow to six. There is no need to remind delegations that the deliberations on both important substantive items are in their third, and final, year. From our experience, we all know that the most strenuous efforts usually come at the end of long negotiations, which in this case would happen to be during the week of 6 to 10 May. With that in mind, it would be most unfortunate to cut short this crucial week of the forthcoming session.

In consultation with the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (DGAACS), the Bureau can propose three alternative options. The first option would be to suspend the consideration of the dates of the 2002 substantive session of the Commission at this stage and to conduct a series of consultations with all regional groups and, on the basis of the outcome of those consultations and consultations with DGAACS, take up this issue at a resumed organizational session, to be convened in March or April.

The second option would be to hold meetings of the Working Groups on Saturday and Sunday, 4 and 5 May. In this case, two Working Group meetings would be planned for each day. The Commission would continue its normal schedule, holding two meetings per day on Monday and Tuesday, 6 and 7 May. There would be no meetings planned for Wednesday, Thursday or Friday, 8 to 9 May. The Secretariat would use that break to process the necessary documents, and the Commission would reconvene for one meeting on Monday, 13 May, to adopt its final report. It should be noted that this option would have financial implications: the two meetings on Saturday would cost one and a half times the usual amount and Sunday's meeting would cost twice the usual amount.

The third option would be to adopt the dates originally suggested by the Secretariat, namely, 22 April to 10 May, but to be ready to adjust our schedule, as need be, in the course of the substantive session itself. Taking note of the information before us, namely, that there can be no meetings on 8, 9 and 10 May, this adjustment could be done by adding one evening meeting, from 6.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m., every day during the week of 29 April to 2 May.

I hope I have put forward the three options in clear terms.

Ms. Arce de Jeannet (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like, through you, Mr. Chairman, to thank the Secretariat for preparing the various options for the 2002 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission that you have just conveyed to us.

The fact that the Disarmament Commission's session would coincide with the special session on children presents us with a difficult situation. Indeed, as the Chairman has pointed out, the final week of the Commission's work would be the most intense, given that all delegations will be making every effort to conclude negotiations in the two Working Groups. We know that an important negotiating effort lies before us in order to satisfactorily complete our consideration of the two substantive items. It is for that reason that Mexico's delegation favours the first option proposed by the Chairman, that is, not to take an immediate decision on the dates for the substantive session and to allow the Chairman to consult with the Secretariat and with the other members of the Bureau to study further options, in order to ensure that the Commission can

have three complete, uninterrupted weeks for its substantive session in order to complete its work successfully.

Aside from its financial implications, the second option would also entail working at a pace that we believe would not be the most desirable. The third option would place us in an uncertain situation. It would be most regrettable if we had to interrupt our work after one week in order to make way for the children's summit. I would therefore like to repeat that we favour the first option.

Mr. Du Preez (South Africa): May I first warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission for the 2002 session. We trust that you will find it an inspiring job. I assure you of my delegation's full support.

I would also like to thank the outgoing Chairperson of the Disarmament Commission, the representative of Jamaica, for her sterling work. The way in which she approached our work made it a more enjoyable experience.

Like the representative of Mexico, I too would like, through you, Sir, to thank the Secretariat for preparing these options. My delegation certainly appreciates having those options and we fully agree with the need to adjust the dates, given the extraordinary circumstances regarding the postponement of the special session on children.

Like Mexico, my delegation would favour suspending consideration of the dates until proper consultations can be conducted with all interested delegations. We think that we will need to carefully consider the options, given the fact that this would be the last year of the current cycle. South Africa would also not be in favour of holding meetings during a religious holiday; nor would we favour holding meetings that would incur additional costs or meetings that would necessitate suspending the work of the Disarmament Commission and then resuming it at a later stage. We think that would break the momentum that will be much needed during this final period. We would therefore suggest postponing the consideration of this matter to a later stage and to take action at the resumed organizational session of the Commission.

The Chairman: I just wish to note that we are not proposing to impinge on Orthodox Good Friday.

Mr. Andresen Guimarães (Portugal): I congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission.

I just wanted to ask a question, as a matter of information, regarding whether or not, among the options that can be considered now — or later, as has been suggested by the delegations that have spoken before me — there is a possibility of having the Disarmament Commission begin its work earlier. By beginning the session on 15 April we could actually complete our work by 3 May and not interfere in any way with the special session on children.

The Chairman: Of course, on the one hand, that would be feasible. But, on the other hand, it has the disadvantage of, let us say, pressing the Disarmament Commission's session too close to the end of the NPT Review Conference Preparatory Committee's session. However, this is a proposal that will be considered further.

Ms. Martinic (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to congratulate the Chairman and the other members of the Bureau on their elections. I also wish, on behalf of my delegation, to thank Ambassador Diane Quarless of Jamaica for the outstanding manner in which she conducted our deliberations during the Disarmament Commission's 2001 session.

As for the options that you, Mr. Chairman, have submitted with regard to the dates of the next substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, my delegation too would support your conducting consultations with the various groups so that we can select the option that provides us with all the time we need to achieve a satisfactory outcome during that session.

In that connection, I would like, through you, to ask the Secretariat whether it already has a calendar of meetings — other than those of the special session — that are expected to take place at Headquarters next year. This would enable us to know what options were available to us.

Ms. Murnaghan (Ireland): As I take the floor for the second time this morning, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as Chairman of the Disarmament Commission at its next substantive session. I would also like very much to associate myself with the congratulations that have been

expressed to the outgoing Chairperson, the representative of Jamaica. I believe that Ambassador Quarless did an excellent job of chairing our previous session. I, like my South African colleague, believe that she chaired the Commission in such as way as to make our work a very pleasurable experience.

With regard to the question of dates for the substantive session next year, I may be in a minority in hoping that we can look at this issue more closely this morning and, perhaps, come to some conclusion. I certainly do not oppose the idea that you, Sir, might conduct consultations if necessary, but I think that you and the Secretariat have very clearly set out the options that are available. I do not believe that our options are very extensive; through my other functions, I well understand that moving the dates of the special session on children has prompted changes to all sorts of other meetings on the United Nations calendar. I certainly agree with those who spoke earlier that the second option, which would involve meeting on Saturday and Sunday, 4 and 5 May, and reconvening on 13 May, has two clear disadvantages in that it would be costly and would mean disrupting the session.

The third option, which, of the three, seems to me to be the best, would not be disruptive. It would allow the Commission a straight run through. I think that, with the understanding of delegations and given the desire to achieve a good result next year, on balance, delegations would be willing to look at the options for late-night — or late-ish night — sessions in the second week. I think that that might be very advantageous in terms of working through the issues and producing a good report at the end.

Mr. Brunet (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election. I would also like to congratulate the outgoing Chairperson, the representative of Jamaica, and to thank the Secretariat for having, through you, provided us with various options to resolve the timetable issue.

I would like to point out that my delegation, like others, believes that informal consultations, under your stewardship, Sir, would enable us to arrive at the most satisfactory solution. I believe that we have proceeded in that manner in the past when trying to resolve such timetable issues, and it would useful to do so in this case, especially as some groups may not have been able to consider the options, which we received only this morning.

We should consider the options in our regional groups. The European Union, for example, has not had the opportunity to discuss this issue. I believe, therefore, that it would be desirable to postpone the final decision on this issue so that we can hold informal consultations.

I think that there are many factors to be taken into consideration. Effectiveness is one such issue. The representative of South Africa rightly referred to the problem of interrupting a session. In other areas of the United Nations in which I have worked I have noticed that we have encountered difficulties when meetings have been chopped up — that is an effectiveness issue. The cost, of course, must also be taken into account. Furthermore, when considering the possibility of holding night meetings, we should ask ourselves whether a definitive decision on the issue needs to be taken in advance, or whether a decision could be postponed until nearer the time, and could be contingent upon whether such meetings will be necessary.

These are the kinds of questions to which we will need to give further thought. Informal consultations among the various relevant regional groups would therefore be welcome.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the Secretary of the Disarmament Commission to respond to the comments made.

Mr. Alasaniya (Secretary of the Disarmament Commission): In order to assist delegations in making their decision, I think that some explanatory comments are necessary. The second option does not presuppose any interruption of the session. Members would be working from Monday, 29 April to Thursday, 2 May. Friday, 3 May, is Orthodox Good Friday, and is not a working day. The session would then continue on Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. There would be no interruption.

By Tuesday, the Committee would be expected to have finished all of its work, adopted the draft report in the Working Groups and considered the final draft report. Those members of delegations who then had to leave town could do so. On the following Monday — 13 May — those who remained could get together with representatives from the permanent missions here in New York for a short meeting simply to formally adopt the final report. So there would be practically no

interruption in the work. I would like members to understand that.

While I have the floor, I would also like to respond to the comment of the representative of Portugal. He raised the issue of moving the beginning of the Disarmament Commission session up to 15 April. The idea of reversing the order of the meetings of the NPT Review Conference Preparatory Committee and of the Disarmament Commission was to ensure that the NPT Preparatory Committee meetings would precede those of the Disarmament Commission, so that the decisions taken by the Preparatory Committee could facilitate agreement on nuclear and other issues within the Disarmament Commission.

If we move the beginning to 15 April, the first week of the session would coincide with the second week of the Preparatory Committee. That would not be a big problem under other circumstances, but the fact that the same delegations — the same disarmament specialists and representatives — are supposed to be in two rooms at the same time would present problems, especially for small delegations. I am not saying that it cannot be done: from a feasibility point of view, the Secretariat is ready to look at it, and I can even say now with near-certainty that it can be arranged. However, the decision is the Commission's, and I do not think it will be happy with that kind of overlap, considering that the Commission does not even want to have two meetings at the same time because of the needs of the small delegations.

Mr. Lee Sang-hwa (Republic of Korea): Let me first warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission at its 2002 session. I also thank the Secretariat for setting out the various options in this difficult situation.

Looking around the room, it appears that not all representatives are present this morning, so it would seem to be a good idea to defer a decision and to bring the issue to the attention of the regional groups, while keeping all the options open, including those we have heard this morning, until the Commission resumes its work next year. It does not appear to be a very good idea to decide to hold weekend meetings, which would have additional financial implications. Nor does the third option seem to me a very good idea: I do not want to prejudge the outcome or any difficulties, but we might need additional evening meetings.

In line with the wish expressed by previous speakers, my delegation too would prefer to defer a decision until the resumed session next year.

Mr. Mourão (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Commission and to thank the delegation of Jamaica for its sterling work in chairing the Disarmament Commission at its last session.

As you said earlier, Sir, 2002 will be a busy year in the field of disarmament. One of the year's events, of course, will be the Disarmament Commission's session. We agree with those who have said that we ought not to approach our work with the possibility that it will be interrupted in the middle of negotiations. As the representative of South Africa said, we must be sure not to break the momentum.

I thank the Secretariat for pointing out that with the second option we would not have such an interruption. But that does not resolve the issue of possible additional costs. As the Chairman has noted, the costs are one and half times as high for Saturdays and twice as high for Sundays. I am not saying that we should not retain the possibility, but we will certainly need to have consultations on the matter. With respect to the third option, it is my understanding that there will always be a possibility of night meetings, no matter what time frame we opt for.

We would thus prefer that this issue be considered at a later stage and in consultation with the regional groups. Let me say at the outset however that my delegation is not prepared to accept a schedule in which the important work of the Disarmament Commission coincides with preparation of work for the NPT review conference. In that regard, we would like as soon as possible to have the information requested by the representative of Argentina with respect to the availability of conference rooms and other facilities, so that we can arrive at the best possible decision and ensure that we can carry out our important work during the substantive session.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): Let me offer a clarification with respect to the statement of the representative of Argentina. The Secretariat informs me that during the special session on children no rooms will be available, because that event will take up all available facilities.

Ms. Martinic (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): My question related also to the entire programme for 2002, so that we could see what options were available for the Disarmament Commission session.

Mr. Persiani (Italy): I think everyone will understand how heartfelt are my congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship. Let me also express my thanks to the outgoing Chairperson for her work.

The options seem to be growing more limited. Surely, an overlap of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT conference and the Disarmament Commission would be most unfortunate. I therefore join other delegations in discarding that possibility. We now have to choose the less unfortunate of two not-very-welcome solutions. There is no way to make everybody happy. The picture appears to be rather clear, and, if only in order to ease your burden, Sir, I would hope that a decision can be put forward today.

For me, the best thing would be to identify and discard the option that has the possibility of provoking more dissent. Italy is open to any solution. I would say that we lean towards the third option: longer meetings, until 9.30 p.m., would do the trick and would not have great cost implications. That might be the solution. But again, we have no preconceptions: basically, we appeal for compromise. We all understand that no one is happy with the situation and that compromise is needed.

I endorse the statement by the representative of Ireland, proposing that we go forward with a decision of some kind.

Mr. Itzchaki (Israel): As your neighbour in our alphabetical seating, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission. I also thank the outgoing Chairperson, the representative of Jamaica, for her work at the 2001 substantive session. We assure you, Sir, of our full cooperation during the deliberations to come.

As to the issue under discussion, it seems that the three options are not something we are very happy with. We would prefer a full substantive session of three weeks in order to reach consensus by the end of those three weeks.

On the first option, we do not oppose ongoing consultations, but I think it would be useful to have several other options for dates in the rather too tight United Nations timetable for 2002. We will, of course, cooperate if the first option is adopted.

As to the second option, we would find some difficulties in having to conduct deliberations on Saturdays, first of all because it would create religious problems for us to work on Saturdays, and secondly because of its financial implications. We would thus not be in a position to accept this option.

The third option is the preferred one for us, as we would already be working, and the momentum of our work would be achieved. This would make our work more efficient, in our view. I will not repeat what other speakers have said; Ireland and Italy have already stated their reasons for preferring the adoption of this option. We would certainly prefer a decision to be taken at this meeting, since some of the representatives here today will be participating in the Commission's substantive session.

Mr. Osei (Ghana): I should like first to echo the sentiments expressed to you, Sir, by other delegations on your election as Chairman of our 2002 session. I assure you of my delegation's cooperation, as we provided also to your predecessor, who did a sterling job that we all appreciated.

We know that the United Nations calendar is very crowded these days, and that it gets more crowded by the year. We see no change in that pattern for next year. Therefore, while we would be happy to see further consultations on this issue, we all know that there is hardly likely to be any major departure from what we have before us today.

Various views have been expressed with regard to the option of working on the weekend. We are totally opposed to that option for reasons that have been given by the delegations of Israel and of South Africa.

The delegation of France has suggested that as part of the process of resolving this issue we allow for discussions in the regional groups. I think that is worthy of consideration. I am sure there are ways of looking at this that will ensure agreement on a strategy that would maximize the time available to us and would facilitate coming to conclusions during our 2002 session. I therefore lend my support to that proposal. In addition to any consultations that would go on with the Secretariat, we should also provide for group-level consultations. Perhaps the Commission could then

meet and discuss whatever agreements were reached at the group level.

Mr. McGinnis (United States of America): I join in extending congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman. My delegation looks forward to working with you, and we wish you the best of luck, in the knowledge that we will have a successful outcome. We also extend our thanks to our Jamaican colleague for the excellent job she did as Chairperson.

We too see this as an issue that needs further discussion and consultation. But I would like to put another twist on the discussion as we continue to work to find a solution. I think we are faced with two bookends, so to speak: the end of the work of the NPT review conference Preparatory Committee and the fact that we will not be able to meet during the special session on children. If we could work in a way that would provide us the number of meetings and the time to focus our efforts, possibly within those bookends — the end of the NPT Preparatory Committee and the beginning of the special session on children — trying to get our work moving along during the course of that period and leaving the option to reach a final conclusion at some point, that would be worth looking at. For practical reasons and cost reasons, we too would not like to see an interruption in the work of the Disarmament Commission. We just throw that out as something for the consideration of members and of you, Sir, as you continue your consultations.

Mr. Sood (India): Let me take this opportunity, Sir, to convey our pleasure at seeing you in the Chair. It gives us a sense of great assurance to know that you will be presiding over the Disarmament Commission in 2002. We are confident that, in your good hands, the Commission will be able to discharge its mandate effectively and in an environment that will be conducive to working in cooperation.

I have no magic solution to the dilemmas that you have presented to us, Sir, other than to say that I am confident that if we can maintain a positive working environment in the Disarmament Commission under your leadership, we will be able to find a way out of using the three days that we are being deprived of for procedural and report-writing work and will be in a position to conclude our substantive work in the time we have before us.

Ms. Quarless (Jamaica): I wish to join my colleagues in expressing warm congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman. I assure you of my fullest support. You are, of course, my neighbour in our seating place, and we have shared much fun during the Commission's meetings. I look forward to giving you all the support you need as you discharge your duties. I would also like to thank my colleagues for their very generous words with regard to my chairmanship during the 2001 session.

I think the Commission finds itself in a pretty tight spot at this time. I too have no magic solutions. I think I would support comprehensively the statement made by the representative of Ghana. I think we would rather not work on the weekends, particularly on the holy weekend. If we were required to hold extra meetings, my delegation would favour evening meetings. However, I think there is much wisdom in taking time to reflect and to consult with our regional groups to see if we can come up with a solution that works.

Certainly, I think it would have been good if we had been able to come to a decision this morning, because so many of our members do not reside in New York. I think it will be a little bit inconvenient to try to reach a decision near the start of the substantive session. I would therefore merely propose, if we are to proceed with consultations with a view to arriving at dates that are agreeable, that we reach that agreement prior to the beginning of the substantive session next year.

Mr. Mourão (Brazil) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have listened attentively to the arguments that have been made, and I fully understand the desire of Ireland and Italy that we should take a decision now. It seems that the third option is the most acceptable to them, given that this option would achieve what all of us would wish: to postpone discussion of this problem to a future date.

There is no doubt in our minds that the option of holding evening meetings is one possibility. But let us talk about this option in the light of its financial implications. If memory does not fail me — and I hope my colleagues will correct me if I am wrong — due to budgetary constraints, we were entitled to hold merely three evening meetings during the entire Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects. How can we decide here and now to hold evening meetings? After all, the Secretariat may

decide to authorize us to hold just two or three evening meetings.

I do not think that we are in a position to take a decision at this moment, even if that is our desire. I wish to repeat that there are financial implications involved that need to be looked into. It is also necessary to have more precise information from the Secretariat, as Argentina has requested, so that we can have a clear idea of what conference rooms and time slots are available.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): The Secretariat will certainly provide fuller information concerning both the options and the financial implications mentioned by the representative of Brazil.

Ms. Arce de Jeannet (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I apologize for taking the floor again, but we think it is important to mention that our delegation does not favour holding evening meetings, for two main reasons: first, because of the financial implications that have been mentioned and, secondly, because we are talking about a session during which we must finalize our consideration of two substantive items, which makes it very important to give regional groups a chance to hold consultations prior to presenting substantive positions in the Working Groups.

If we decide to adopt a programme of work that includes evening meetings, we would be limiting the ability of regional groups to hold meetings. As we know, it is sometimes necessary to move right from meetings of the two Working Groups into regional group meetings. If we decide to work evenings, we would be jeopardizing the possibility of holding consultations in regional groups.

The Mexican delegation is flexible on the issue of dates. We are sure that the Secretariat will be able to find three consecutive weeks during which the Disarmament Commission can work without interruption and that our work will not be affected by unexpected factors.

Mr. Andresen Guimarães (Portugal): I thank the Secretary for the information he provided and for reminding us that there would, indeed, be an overlap if we started a week earlier, as the question that I asked suggested. As some delegations have referred to this, I would like to say that we were not proposing an overlap; we had simply forgotten that there would be one.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to join earlier speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission for the next substantive session. I would also like to congratulate the representative of Jamaica for the work she carried out as Chairperson of the Commission.

I will be very brief, because Cuba's views on this matter have already been expressed by other speakers. Given that the timetable options for the substantive session of the Disarmament Commission have been presented to us only today, we are in favour of continuing our consultations, as suggested in the first option, so as to find the best time to hold the session, given the various other important events taking place in 2002.

I believe that we should give ourselves sufficient time to complete our consideration of the two substantive items that we will be discussing next year — we should retain the three weeks that were envisaged for the work of the Commission. We are therefore inclined towards the first option: to continue consultations on the subject.

Mr. Thapa (Nepal): My delegation too is very pleased that you, Sir, will be chairing the Commission at its 2002 substantive session. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing Chairperson of the Disarmament Commission at its previous session, the representative of Jamaica, with whom I had the opportunity to serve in the Bureau. This year, too, Nepal has indicated its interest in joining the Bureau, subject, of course, to the approval of the Asian Group.

With regard to the various proposals that have been floated today about how best to organize our 2002 session, three options have been presented. A number of delegations seem to have spoken about the merits and demerits of, and expressed their preferences for, the various options. My delegation is one of those that would prefer to avoid any overlap of meetings. That has, of course, now been ruled out. I would also like to say that there are certain things that we might not be able to avoid. We do not, for example, want to incur any additional costs; we do not want any interruptions; and we do not want late-night meetings. But it might not be possible to achieve all of that. My purpose in

speaking is to make it known that my delegation would prefer evening meetings to weekend meetings. If we could organize the meetings without incurring any additional costs — even if that would mean the session being interrupted for one or two days — my delegation would not be opposed to that.

Mr. Rowe (Sierra Leone): I would like to join others in congratulating you, Mr. Chairman, on your election. I would also like to express our appreciation to the representative of Jamaica for her contribution to our work during the previous session.

My delegation has listened to all of the proposals and options presented by the Secretariat. I would like to thank the Secretariat for giving us that information; I am sure that it did its homework in coming up with the three options. I believe that they have budgetary and religious implications and raise the question of continuity, an issue to which delegations have referred. I would like to know what impact each of the three options would have in that respect. I suggest that we convene informal consultations during the course of this General Assembly session, between now and December or the end of November, so that the outcomes of the consultations within the regional groups can be put together. Such informal consultations may provide openings; any ideas could then be considered in January, and a decision could be made in January, February or even March.

Meanwhile, the Secretariat may wish to prepare a comparison of the financial implications of the various options. As my delegation sees it, based on what I have heard, there will be financial implications — I foresee that. So perhaps the Secretariat would look into this issue and give us comparative figures so that we can select the cheapest option. It might not necessarily be the best, but at least we would have an idea of the cost. We do not want to spend too much money, but we want to try to make our work effective.

Having listened to all of the comments, I suggest that at the end of this meeting the regional groups meet and that in, say, two weeks' time, we hold informal consultations, with the expectation that we will be taking a decision in January, February or even March. Perhaps the Secretariat could come up with comparative figures in time for such informal consultations or, if not by then, by January.

Mr. Persiani (Italy): I am grateful to the delegations of Brazil and Mexico for stating the logistical difficulties implied in some of the options; this may help us be clearer about the way forward. Let me repeat that Italy has no problem with any of the options. But we can see that there is a strong resistance to weekend meetings. As far as the third option is concerned — late evening meetings — I have heard three basic arguments. The first relates to the cost. We had a very good reminder here: I think everyone had been working on the assumption that costs in the evening were less than costs on the weekend, but that remains to be clarified.

The second thing I heard was that late evenings are always available to delegations, so, in a sense, that is not a true option. On the other hand, we could say the same of weekends: they are always available for delegations to discuss, to meet, to draft papers and to take common positions — especially our final weekend.

The third argument I heard was that regional groups need long nights to take decisions and that we would be depriving them of a much-needed option. Like the other points, this is a serious one. I can imagine two ways out: the first — and we will probably be forced to do this — is to use the mornings. We do this on a regular basis in the Group of Western European and other States, and it is always available as a possibility. I would also propose a second way out: to see whether it would be possible to hold long night meetings on alternate days. That would spread the use of long night meetings over two weeks, not just one. I do not know if this is feasible, but it would make it possible to have an official meeting one night and group meetings on the next, if needed or desired.

Mr. Khairat (Egypt): I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the Disarmament Commission. We believe that, with your guidance and your vast experience, we will reach agreement and consensus on the two substantive items before us in their final year of consideration. Let me also express my appreciation for the good work of the outgoing Chairperson of the Disarmament Commission, the representative of Jamaica.

My delegation has listened to the debate on the organization of work and the timing of the 2002 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission. My delegation is open to joining any consensus reached in that regard. But I believe that it will be very difficult, logistically, to work on the weekends, in

particular because the Chairpersons of the two Working Groups always use the weekends to prepare revisions of their documents — especially as this is the last year and as they will need ample weekend time to prepare those documents. The Secretariat too needs to work on the weekends.

I also believe that the idea put forward by the representative of Sierra Leone is a good one: that we should give regional groups some time to discuss this matter and give the Secretariat some time to define the financial implications of the various options. I believe that this is the best way to go, considering that this is not the first time that we will have deferred taking action on the timing of a Disarmament Commission session.

Mr. Du Preez (South Africa): We have discussed this issue now for about an hour and a half since proposals were made that we should continue the consultations in regional and other groups. I have heard several such proposals made. I would like to reiterate the need for such consultations. Clearly, we need to consider the options presented by the Secretariat and, perhaps, look into other options. I have heard several interesting ideas; in particular, the proposal made by the representative of Sierra Leone seems to make a lot of sense to my delegation. We would therefore like to suggest that we conclude this discussion and allow more time for consultations. We should then convene an informal meeting of the Disarmament Commission with a view to reaching agreement in this regard.

The Chairman: Before I outline what I feel is the common understanding of members, let me give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Alasaniya (Secretary of the Disarmament Commission): Let me comment on questions that were addressed to the Secretariat. There was a question about whether evening meetings would have any financial implications. Yes, the financial cost of evening meetings is the same as that of Saturday meetings, which is one and a half times the usual amount. A question was also asked about a cost comparison. I would be most happy to prepare such a comparison, but at this stage I can say that one meeting, with all language and other services provided, including verbatim records, costs approximately $6,000. So, we can say that one and a half would be $9,000 and twice would be $12,000. That is the normal cost of such meetings.

It was suggested that the Secretariat should look at other dates. We are, of course, ready to do that. I know that we can find three consecutive weeks that do not interfere with other events. However, we have not yet done that for one simple reason: the idea was to act for the benefit of representatives who are coming from out of town — especially from Geneva. We thought that they would be coming here for five consecutive weeks starting on 9 April, for two weeks of the NPT Preparatory Committee and three weeks of the Disarmament Commission. Now, as that seems impossible, we will be glad to look at other dates, and the Secretariat will provide a couple of sets of dates for informal and formal consultations. I will try to have at least two — and maybe even three — different sets of dates that will provide three consecutive weeks.

I will make one last observation while I have the floor. When we were looking at and preparing the options, there was one option that I did not want to bring up, but which I am sure that members will bring up in the informal consultations: to do away with plenary meetings. There are two days of plenary meetings at the beginning, which is four meetings. If the Commission starts with discussions in the Working Groups, considering that this is the third year of discussion, then it will be gaining back those four meetings. That has an advantage because members will be seeing one another before the start of the Disarmament Commission session for two weeks within the framework of NPT. They will have the chance to say anything new on disarmament that they want to say. That might also be an option to look at.

The Chairman: I thank the Secretariat for that statement. Of course, everybody knows what is involved in coming here from Geneva. But the Chairman is always *super partes*. So, drawing from all the interventions, including those by the representatives of France, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Egypt and others — and I am sorry for not mentioning all of them — I think that we can say this: we will without a doubt wait for the Secretariat to give us a better and more detailed overall picture of the situation with respect to both timing and financial cost. Secondly, no doubt informal consultations could go on — here in New York I trust, and also in Geneva. When those consultations make it possible to put forward some common ground, we can return to New York and come to a final conclusion without repeating a series of formal consultations. I know that there is great support

for the Chairman; so, I am sure that members will be generous by not increasing my travel expenditures.

Since we have just considered the provisional agenda of the 2002 substantive session, let us now address the establishment of the Working Groups to deal with the two substantive agenda items. I suggest that we re-establish Working Groups I and II to deal with the two substantive items on our agenda. Moreover, as in previous years, we have to establish the Committee of the Whole to deal with other substantive and organizational matters.

If there are no comments, I will take it that the Commission wishes to establish those three bodies.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I should like to note that, according to the provisions of the reform programme that has been adopted, all organizational matters should be concluded at the organizational session of the Disarmament Commission. Fortunately, as I said earlier, we do not have to deal with the appointments of the Chairpersons for the two subsidiary bodies since last year's Chairpersons, Mr. Yaw Odei Osei of Ghana and Ms. Gabriela Martinic of Argentina, will continue in that capacity for the final remaining year of the consideration of those items.

However, there are several pending issues at this stage, namely the nomination of candidates for the remaining vice-chairmanships of the Commission. As I mentioned earlier, that process will require some time to be finalized. Accordingly, it might be advisable for the Commission to suspend this organizational session until a later date in order for delegations to carry on further consultations. In this sense, I will not adjourn the session; I will only suspend it. I should like to encourage regional groups to proceed with their consultations on an urgent basis.

The Chairman: I call on the representative of Ghana.

Mr. Osei (Ghana): Wearing the hat of Chairman of Working Group I, I assure you, the Chairman of the United Nations Disarmament Commission for 2002, of the support of our Working Group.

Finally, I take this opportunity to recall that at the conclusion of our last session a number of delegations indicated their desire, willingness and preparedness to submit proposals that would help in the revision of the Chairman's working paper. I wish to encourage them to do so between now and, certainly, the end of the year so that we can use them in revising the Chairman's paper that was discussed and was attached to our last report.

The Chairman: I call on the representative of Argentina.

Ms. Martinic (Argentina): I will also be very brief. In my capacity as Chairperson of Working Group II, I would like to remind delegations of paragraph 8 of our report, in which the Working Group requested me to gather information on documents and meetings on existing confidence-building measures in the field of conventional arms; this information was to be provided by delegations, preferably by 1 December 2001, on the understanding that they might submit further information at a later stage. In that regard, I would like to encourage colleagues and friends to start doing their homework and to try to meet that first deadline. Again, I emphasize that this is with the understanding that they might submit further information at a later stage. Of course, as they know very well, I am always open to hearing suggestions and receiving contributions for the second version of the paper that I am supposed to present sometime before our next session.

The Chairman: The date of the next meeting of the Disarmament Commission will be announced in the *Journal of the United Nations*.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.